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ABSTRACT

This curriculum guide to a mini-course in world literature for high school students is restricted to the study of five short novels written in the twentieth century: "Demian" and "Siddhartha" by Hesse, "Platero and I" by Jimenez, "We Never Make Mistakes" by Solzhenitsyn, and "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" by Joyce. The objectives of the course are to help the student develop proficiency in (1) analyzing different views of common problems in living, (2) expressing and defending his ideas, (3) reflecting in his discussion and composition a facility and a precision in the use of language, (4) identifying various levels of meaning in fiction, (5) analyzing moral problems presented in literature, (6) explaining the use of literary symbols, (7) explaining the relationships between man and nature expressed in Western humanism and Eastern religious thought, and (8) evaluating humanitarian concerns in world literature. The guide includes suggestions for writing assignments, discussions, and reports, and a list of critical materials on these five novels. (Author/DI)

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ENGLISH MINI-COURSE

WORLD LITERATURE

(PRELIMINARY, UNEDITED VERSION)

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DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

THE BOARD OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

Louis J. Kishkunas, Superintendent

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FOREWORD

The intention of this mini-course in World Literature is to give the high school student the opportunity to study closely a few well known works of the twentieth century. The titles selected emerge from two major considerations: their interest in humanization and their length, shorter than the usual novel but longer than the usual short story. Since each book represents the ultimate in compression, the impact compels not only the student's awareness of the progressive levels of common experience, but also the student's recognition of kinship in his search for meaning in life and his discovery of himself. Within each text the student finds another's journey inward toward maturity, which in spite of time is reminiscent of his own experience.

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this course is that the student, through his reading, writing, discussing, and listening, develop proficiency:

- . In analyzing different views of the common problems of living as found in literature.
- . In becoming skillful in expressing and defending his views.
- . In reflecting in his discussion and his composition a facility and a precision in the use of language.
- . In identifying the various levels of meaning in fiction.
- . In analyzing man's capacity for good and evil as presented in the literature.
- . In explaining how a writer's symbols enrich his work.
- . In explaining the transcendental relationship between man and nature expressed in Western humanism and Eastern religious thought through literature read.
- . In evaluating the basic humanity expressed in world literature.

READINGS FOR THE COURSE

1. *Demian* by Hermann Hesse
2. *Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse
3. *Platero and I* by Juan Ramón Jiménez
4. *We Never Make Mistakes* by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn
5. *A Portrait of an Artist As a Young Man* by James Joyce

OVERVIEW

Of the five books listed, *Demian* and *Siddhartha* are the ideal ones to open the course because they parallel human experience and are deceptively simple to read. Thus, both give pleasure as tales before Hesse's layers of meaning are added. And through the flux of progression and regression both reach the same goal, the protagonist's discovery of himself.

In *Demian*, according to Theodore Ziolkowski, Hesse creates a modern gospel enriched by his use of myth and symbol. Hesse traces Emil Sinclair's growing up over a period of ten years from his boyish innocence through periods of suspicion and rebellion to an awakening, which represents the final synthesis of "internalization" of the group ideal, not found in the outside world, but within. Sinclair progresses, with Demian's help and tutelage, through the Kroner episode, through the shattering explications of Cain and Abraxas, through the enchantments of Pistorius and Frau Eva to the death of Demian in World War I. The student becomes a part of Sinclair's experience while at the same time he ponders the widening circles of meaning, while he questions the validity of Demian as a Christ figure, and while he tries to visualize the action of the book as the fall and redemption of man.

From *Demian*, the student turns to *Siddhartha*, based on Oriental religious philosophy - Hesse's heritage from his missionary father and grandfather. Again, the student analyzes Hesse's symbols and motifs: the river, the dreams, the smile or asceticism, wealth, love, each of which contributes to the legendary quality of the book. And like the boyish Sinclair encountering the dark world beyond his home, the older Siddhartha leaves his Brahman family and home for a new life among the Samanas; and like a medieval Everyman, Siddhartha tastes of life with Kamaswami, the rich merchant, and with Kamala, the courtesan, and with Vasudeva, the boatman. Sharing Vasudeva's simple life, Siddhartha discovers by the river the unity of man and nature, which Ziolkowski calls "totality and simultaneity of all being." Contributing to the mystical quality of *Siddhartha* is Hesse's use of Joycean epiphanies to express the inherent unity of the river or the smile in "a burst of radiance." Although Hesse draws on the life of Buddha in *Siddhartha*, he does not embrace Buddhism, but resolves the book by reaffirming his conviction that no man's way to maturity is prescribed, as in Buddhism, but that every man travels that way essentially alone through the stages of guilt, disillusion, alienation, and despair to the final experience of unity.

The legendary and imaginative qualities of Hesse's prose in *Siddhartha* prepare the student for *Platero and I* by the Spanish poet, Juan Ramón Jiménez, winner of the 1956 Nobel Prize. This book, written early in his career and first published in 1914, was not translated into English until 1957, when two English translations appeared almost simultaneously. Hopefully the intervening years have not diminished the charm of these fine short prose pieces, distinguished by their poise, restraint, and singleness of effect.

The little volume of poetic prose essays by Juan Ramón Jiménez, *Platero and I*, published over fifty years ago for children, represents in many ways the innocence of the pastoral life, still lingering in Spain at the turn of the century. Juan Ramón makes memorable the children, the animals, the birds, and the landscape

of Moguer, his native village, with the magic of language addressed to Platero, his gentle and knowing companion, an Andalusian burro. Page after page reveals the simple life of work and faith before the corruption of doubt or the erosion of spirit. By his closeness to nature, or his oneness with nature, Juan Ramón with rare delicacy, frequently nostalgic and occasionally precious, recreates for the student a series of vignettes of the daily life of his childhood. With his "poetic pony," Juan Ramón traverses the narrow walled streets of Moguer and travels the dusty, country roads of Andalusia. One critic suggests that Platero belongs to the select number of beasts that will never die, like Odysseus' Argus and Alice's White Rabbit. He pictures Platero as a kind of "lightning rod" for the imagination of the poet as well as the focus of his "speculative creativity." The perceptive student finds in *Platero and I* much that is sensitive and humane and much that is refreshing.

The two novellas by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn included in *We Never Make Mistakes* are good examples of modern Russian writing. The first, "An Incident at Krechetovka Station," records with an almost theatrical sparseness of detail an episode at an isolated railway junction in World War II. Lieutenant Zotov, a studious peaceful sort of man, disturbed by the lack of progress in the war and tormented by several aggressive women in the town, tries to study and to be loyal to his wife and child. His job is to keep the supply trains moving, whether they carry horses or flour or shovels or blankets; and all transport carries old women, children, and stragglers, soldiers lost from their echelons. Into Lieutenant Zotov's bare office on a rainy autumn night steps a middle-aged straggler dressed in a mongrel uniform, collar torn off, his neck wrapped in a long woolen scarf. Lieutenant Zotov is attracted first by the stranger's resonant voice, then by his fine head and genteel manners. Igor Dementevich, the lost soldier, who had been an actor, had no official papers in the pockets of his miserable uniform, but he had two photographs: one of his daughter and one of his wife and son. These he shares with the lonely Zotov, and the relationship in the bare office between the lieutenant and the straggler is transformed into that of two intelligent men longing for their families. Later, because Igor Dementevich had not heard of Stalingrad, Lieutenant Zotov feels compelled to turn him over to the secret police to investigate. Thereafter, over a period of months, realizing that Igor Dementevich might be innocent, the lieutenant calls the secret police to learn the outcome of their investigation. He is told, "We never make mistakes."

In "Incident" Solzhenitsyn, called a moral artist, underscores with irony the problem of conscience. Is following orders an excuse for an unknowing criminal act? Must a man blot out his conscience to be a good soldier? For the student who reads, it is not possible that the implications of "Incident" will be lost, for Solzhenitsyn's prose is powerful. And almost as open-ended as "Incident," is the second novella, "Matryona's House," regarded as something of a masterpiece.

This is the story of a peasant woman, Matryona, whose six children had died in infancy. She is eliminated from the collective farm because she has no husband; she is abused by her relatives because she is poor; she is taken advantage of by her brother-in-law, who in his youth had expected to marry her. The scene, one critic suggests, could be from Tolstoy rather than after forty years of Soviet rule. The narrator of the tale, a school teacher who had been in prison, observes the greed, the superstition and the illiteracy that surround Matryona, whose only possessions are her rubber plants, a white goat, a lame cat, and the mice which live in the walls of her house. Matryona digs her own peat, and digs or plows for others without payment. She is a veritable work horse, whose story

the teacher learns partly from her and partly from others. With Matryona's death at an unguarded railroad crossing, the teacher realizes that it is Matryona who was "the righteous one"

Although Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, another nobel prize-winning author, first published these novellas in 1963, both stand today as solid expressions of that dark atmosphere of human torment and endurance, so long characteristic of Russian literature.

The final work for this course, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, might well open the course, for certainly each author, with the exception of Jiménez, would admit the influence of James Joyce, who introduced and developed in *Portrait* three new techniques: the stream-of-consciousness, the epiphany, and the use of myth, of which Hermann Hesse used the latter two in *Siddhartha*.

Published in 1914, *Portrait* remains the most moving and richly imaginative account of a young man's search for meaning in life and a young man's radiant discovery of himself. It is, in addition, the most dramatic and unforgettable story of the journey inward, whether Stephen Dedalus is James Joyce in fact or his fiction. Joyce himself viewed the work as the gestation of a soul, a writer's soul, by which "the word is made flesh" and thoughts, not actions, compose the plot. The sensory images of his childhood at Blackrock and in Dublin become symbols; his reactions to teachers at Clongowes Wood and Belvedere become motifs; the descriptions of his family and friends peak with the use of epiphanies. The long day with his father at Queens College, Cork, ends in alienation; the retreat, during which his anguished spirit wanders through hell, contributes to his rejection of the priesthood; by the time of his graduation at twenty from University College, Dublin, he has determined to become a writer - to leave his family, his church, and his country, for all symbolize to him the Cretan labyrinth of the ancient Daedalus. So in Paris after ten years of revision the old manuscript of *Stephan Hero* becomes *A Portrait of An Artist As A Young Man*.

TIME SCHEDULE

The order of the books, as indicated above, is not important. *Demian* and *Siddhartha* will likely require three weeks, and *Portrait* will certainly need four weeks. *Platero* and *We Never Make Mistakes* might require ten days in a ratio of four to six.

SUGGESTED AND RELATED ACTIVITIES

The following are a few possible methods for conducting the class work of this course:

1. The use of check tests to establish the facts of the book at hand.
2. The use of inductive class discussion to solve the problems and to identify the layers of meaning.
3. The use of prepared voluntary student reports to handle specific areas of uncommon knowledge, such as Buddhism, the psychology of C.G. Jung, or the political situation in Ireland at the turn of the century.
4. The use of voluntary panel discussions, prepared with notes, in which students take opposite points of view on a major question, such as the following: Is it essential that a youth repudiate his home and culture for his own personal growth?
5. The use of expository writing, except for *Platero*, which hopefully will prompt a few personal narratives. A sample writing subject for an expository theme on *Siddhartha* might be: Is Siddhartha's disillusionment in his life as a merchant or his life as a lover, inevitable?

SUGGESTED SUBJECTS FOR STUDENT REPORTS, PANELS,
AND WRITING FOR DEMIAN

REPORTS

1. The major philosophic ideas of Friederick Nietzsche.
2. The major psychological concepts of C.G. Jung.
3. The basic psychological principles of Sigmund Freud.
4. The essential points of Existentialism according to Camus or Sartre.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

1. Does Demian exist or is he a symbolic representation of Sinclair's other self?
2. Is Demian a Christ figure?
3. Are Hesse's symbols, such as Abraxas and the phoenix, essential to the meaning of the novel?

WRITING FOR DEMIAN

1. Is it necessary for Sinclair to repudiate his home and tradition for the sake of personal growth?
2. Is the philosophy of *Demian* for the most part Existentialism?
3. How does Herman Hesse make World War I a positive influence on Sinclair?

WRITING FOR SIDDHARTHA.

1. Using something in nature like the river as a symbol, create your own myth with multiple layers of meaning.
2. Develop your discussion of *Siddhartha* around Theodore Ziolkowski's idea that the polar opposites to be reconciled - the spirit and the senses - are divided by the river, which constitutes the natural synthesis of extremes.
3. Agree or disagree with Ziolkowski's statement: "Siddhartha's wanderings in geographical space parallel his inner development."

WRITING FOR PLATERO AND I

If in teaching *Platero*, the emphasis is placed upon the singleness of effect Juan Ramón accomplishes through the limited scope of each piece, the precise language of his descriptions and his sensitive but disciplined imagination, the student who has a pet, or who had one as a child, may respond to *Platero* and find himself able to recreate some scenes or experiences of his own.

WRITING FOR WE NEVER MAKE MISTAKES

1. Why does the lieutenant feel compelled to turn the straggler over to the secret police?
2. Is Igor Dementevich a White Russian spy?
3. How do you conclude the secret police handled the investigation?
4. Discuss Solzhenitsyn's use of irony in "Incident" or "Matryona's House."
5. Prepare the skeleton for a mock trial of Igor to be acted out in class a la improvisation.
6. Is Matryona indeed a "righteous one ..." or a fool?
7. What part does conscience play in regard to the journey inward? Is Zotov, or Faddei, a responsible adult?
8. Is "following orders" an excuse for a criminal act?

STUDENT REPORTS FOR A PORTRAIT OF THE
ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN

1. Sources and philosophy of the retreat sermons.
2. Philosophy of Saint Francis Xavier.
3. Philosophy of Ignatius Loyola.
4. The political and economic situation in Ireland at the turn of the century.
5. Sources and content of Stephen's aesthetic theories.

WRITING SUBJECTS FOR PORTRAIT

1. What is ironic about the problems of Stephen's family?
2. Is there anything of value in Stephen's parochial education?
3. Is it necessary for Stephen to leave his family, his church, and his country in order to become a writer?
4. Would Stephen have been a successful priest?
5. Is Chapter I important to the rest of the book in regard to content and technique?

SUGGESTED SUBJECTS FOR THE FINAL PANEL
DISCUSSIONS OF THE COURSE

1. Must a youth repudiate his home and his culture?
2. Is reconciliation between the ideas of parents and those of youth impossible?
3. Is accepting one's tradition "returning to the womb"?
4. Is Stephen's leaving Dublin for Paris a romantic escape?
5. Must one blot out his conscience in order to be a good soldier or a good citizen?
6. Is the use of symbol, myth, and epiphany a fad for intellectuals?
7. Does literature have value in today's world?

RESOURCE BOOKS FOR TEACHERS

DEMIAN AND SIDDHARTHA

- Baumer, Franz. *Hermann Hesse*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1969.
- Boulby, Mark. *Hermann Hesse: His Mind and Art*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1967.
- Field, George W. *Hermann Hesse*. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1970.
- Freedman, Ralph. *The Lyrical Novel*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963.
- Ziolkowski, Theodore. *The Novels of Hermann Hesse*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965.

PLATERO AND I

- Florit, Eugenio, editor. *Selected Writings of Juan Ramón Jiménez*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Cudahy, 1957.
- Olson, Paul R. *Circle of Paradox: Time and Essence In the Poetry of Juan Ramón Jiménez*. Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967.
- Fitts, Dudley. "A Minor Prelude to a Major Career," *The New York Times Book Review*. New York, August 11, 1957.
- Guillen, Claudio. "Books and Comment," *The New Republic*. New York, December 16, 1957.
- Honig, Edwin. "Poetic Pony," *The Saturday Review Of Literature*. New York, December 7, 1957.

WE NEVER MAKE MISTAKES

- Alvarez, A. "Bread and Kvass," *The New York Times Review of Books*. New York, September 24, 1964.

Friedberg, Maurice. "Crisis and Continuity," *The Saturday Review of Literature*. New York, November 2, 1963.

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN

Burgess, Anthony. *ReJoyce*. New York: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1965.

Morris, William E. and Nault, Clifford G. Jr. *A Casebook on James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. New York: The Odyssey Press, Inc., 1962.

Ryf, Robert S. *A New Approach To Joyce*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1962.

Schutte, William M., editor. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of a Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968.

Tindall, William York. *A Reader's Guide to Joyce*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959.